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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TFGG01: RUSSIA TESTS UNSC WATERS ON GEORGIA,
DOESN'T DIVE IN

Classified By: Political Counselor Jeffrey Delaurentis for Reasons 1.4
B/D.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Russian PermRep Churkin hastily called for Security Council consultations on Georgia this afternoon during which he announced that he was formally putting Russia's draft resolution before the Council "into blue," a procedural move that would allow but not require a vote on the resolution as early as August 22. Several members expressed concern that adoption of the Russian draft would enshrine its ambiguity regarding the mandate of Russian troops in Georgia and would depart from longstanding Council support for Georgia's territorial integrity. Only Indonesia, South Africa, and Libya supported the Russian text as is. Some European members of the Council remain anxious to create an alternative text that could meet with Russian approval.
END SUMMARY.

Russia Puts Resolution "in Blue"

¶2. (SBU) Russia called on short notice for Security Council consultations on Georgia on August 21. Russian PermRep Churkin told members at the outset of the session that Russian forces will have pulled back by the evening of August 22 to "peacekeeping zones" established in the agreements that ended the earlier Georgia-South Ossetia conflict. Asked by French Deputy PermRep LaCroix whether Russia's force strength would revert to the 500 peacekeeping troops authorized under the 1992 Sochi Agreement, Churkin replied that Sochi didn't set troop ceilings and that the strength established in implementation of Sochi was 1,500 troops. (COMMENT. Churkin was clearly implying that Russia may decide that all 1,500 peacekeepers can be Russian in contrast to the 500 apiece deployed by Russia, South Ossetia, and Georgia consequent to Sochi. END COMMENT.)

¶3. (SBU) Churkin said Russian forces, once pulled back to the South Ossetia vicinity, would require an additional ten days to redeploy to Russia. After outlining Russian plans to coordinate humanitarian relief to South Ossetia with the ICRC and UNHCR, Churkin suggested that Russia is acting in full accord with the "six-point plan" supported by the parties to the conflict and called for urgent adoption of the draft resolution circulated by Russia on August 20 (a verbatim recitation of the six "Sarkozy-Medvedev principles") as a demonstration of international community support for the plan as the way forward in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He said the clarification letter from French President Sarkozy to Georgian President Saakashvili was not intended to be part of the six-point plan, but added that "we have no problem with the content of the letter." He then asked the Secretariat to distribute Russia's draft resolution "in blue," meaning that a Council vote on it could be held after a 24-hour waiting period.

Russian Draft Garners Little Support, Lots of Questions

¶4. (SBU) LaCroix said France had several areas of concern regarding both Russian conduct on the ground in Georgia and the Russian draft resolution. He cited French Foreign Minister Kouchner in calling Russian troop movements encouraging but needing to be accelerated and completed. La Croix said "two columns of troops pulling back out of 10,000 men deployed" is just a beginning, especially when placed in a context of a continuous Russian maritime presence and a worrying mention by the Russian General Staff about the establishment of a "buffer zone" that would obviously not be in conformity with the six principles or prior agreements. "The six points are strict," LaCroix said, "and not a license" setting Russia free to do as it pleases. LaCroix also voiced concern over the Russian draft's omission of a reference to Georgia's territorial integrity as inconsistent with longstanding Council practice. Concluding on a positive note, LaCroix said he had "noted with great interest that Ambassador Churkin said that Russia does not object to the content of the letter to Saakashvili. This had been our understanding as well, and is an element that should allow us to make more progress on a resolution."

¶5. (SBU) Ambassador Wolff detailed the letter from President Sarkozy to President Saakashvili containing the clarifications which secured the Georgian President's signature. He pointed out that the letter restricted Russian forces to the South Ossetia vicinity and specifically excluded them from urban areas, including Gori. He asked how a Russian checkpoint near Poti, 85 miles from the South Ossetia boundary, could be considered in line with those restrictions. Noting Churkin's description of the Russian

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humanitarian effort, Wolff said Georgians were not being allowed to return to South Ossetia and that ethnic cleansing threatened to be the net result of the Russian incursion into that area. He said the U.S. could not support a resolution that enshrined ambiguity, calling rather for clarity on Russian follow-on presences and recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity.

¶6. (SBU) UK PermRep Sawers, Belgian PermRep Grauls, Croatian Deputy PermRep Vilovic, and Costa Rican PermRep Urbina echoed this call for any resolution to include a clear statement of respect for Georgia's territorial integrity.

¶7. (SBU) Indonesia, South Africa, and Libya urged the Council to adopt the Russian text based on the six principles and to thereafter consider any implementation problems that might arise. Panamanian PermRep Arrias said Panama would have supported the Russian draft several days ago before the Sarkozy-Sakashvili letter surfaced, but now would consider carefully the concerns raised by France. He concluded that "Council action now could do more harm than good" given the division among members. Burkina Faso PermRep Katondo urged consensus before moving forward. China and Vietnam were silent. Chinese PolCouns said afterwards that Beijing hoped the situation on the ground would improve so that Council members could reach consensus on the way forward.

¶8. (C) COMMENT. Our straw poll gives Russia's draft text four potential votes -- Russia, South Africa, Libya, and Indonesia. Churkin said he had no instructions to call for a vote or even to have the full Council engage on the Russian draft at the customary expert level. Following the session, several European members of the Council approached Ambassador Wolff to express eagerness to develop an alternative to the Russian draft with potential to meet with Russian approval.

Khalilzad